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TAGS: [SCUL](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [PGOV](#) [US](#) [UZ](#)
SUBJECT: BACK TO THE BASICS IN UZBEK EDUCATION

REF: A. 06 TASHKENT 2196

[1](#)B. 06 TASHKENT 1064

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JON R. PURNELL FOR REASONS 1.4(B) AND (D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: In back-to-back meetings with Uzbek education ministers on February 28, SCA Deputy Assistant Secretary Evan Feigenbaum heard a rehearsed tune of openness

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to "dialogue and cooperation" regarding U.S. education programs. While both ministers acknowledged the merits of exchanges, they stated that Uzbek national education standards are foremost and that students who study abroad must repeat the academic year upon their return. The Embassy's Youth Exchange Opportunity program was characterized as being "one-sided" and the closure of American Councils (ACCELS) and American Corners was conducted, according to the Minister, in accordance with Uzbek law. A short-term summer exchange program, the return of Fulbright scholars, and U.S. recommendations on vocational training may be topics for future discussion. End summary

Minister of Public Education: Reinvigorating Education

[1](#)2. (C) Underscoring the importance of education as an investment in Uzbekistan's future and as an integral component of the 2002 U.S.-Uzbek Strategic Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, DAS Feigenbaum urged Minister of Public Education Turobjon Djuraev to explore ways of reinvigorating educational opportunities with the U.S. DAS Feigenbaum explained that the Embassy's Youth Exchange Opportunity (YEO) program and other scholarship exchanges should be viewed as avenues of cooperation and developed to their fullest potential. However, he said, there were problems and obstacles in the implementation of these programs. He noted the worldwide prestige of the Fulbright program and cited the merits of the American Corners, stating that re-opening the Corners could facilitate an exchange of ideas and information, as well as expose Uzbek students to American literature and other topics. In seeking to expand cooperation in education, DAS Feigenbaum said that the U.S. is open to discussion with the end result being increased cooperation on specific education programs.

"Send Us a Proposal - We'll Get Back to You!"

[1](#)3. (C) In response, Minister Djuraev repeatedly stated that Uzbekistan is open to "dialogue and cooperation," but stressed that all international programs must adhere to national education standards and meet the needs of the country. In particular, he said that the YEO program was "one-sided," focusing only on improvement of the student's

English language training but failing to meet Uzbek educational requirements. These requirements, he said, are in accordance with Uzbek law.

14. (C) High school-aged students, he continued, were not permitted to be absent from school for more than one week; although in principle, students were able to participate in short-term exchange programs during school holidays. DAS Feigenbaum stated it was important to find a way to reintegrate students into the Uzbek school system after their study abroad. U.S. exchanges, he said, afforded Uzbekistan the opportunity to remain competitive with globalization and increased mutual understanding between the U.S. and Uzbekistan.

15. (C) Minister Djuraev acknowledged that while American Council's high school exchange had achieved success since it began operating in Uzbekistan in 1994, the Uzbek courts had closed American Council's program for "reasons that were well-known." (Reftel B.) He said that he would consider U.S. education proposals, including a summer exchange program and possibly English language teacher training. He reiterated that Uzbekistan is open to dialogue on educational opportunities, stating that "we are not rejecting them" and promised to respond to all Embassy proposals.

Re-Opening American Corners

16. (C) DAS Feigenbaum suggested that American Corners be re-opened in order to provide students and the public with access to books and information about the U.S. The minister replied that if the Uzbek courts had closed them down there must be good reasons for this, noting that the original mandate of some organizations often "evolves into something else." (Note: There was no Uzbek court decision to close the Embassy's five American Corners in 2005. GOU officials pressured local administrators to close the Corners. Reftel

A.)

Minister of Higher Education: Moving Beyond Dialogue

17. (C) Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Higher Education Rustam Kosimov appeared slightly more receptive to cooperation. He echoed his colleague, saying that "education has no boundaries" and that the Ministry was ready for "dialogue and cooperation." In response to DAS Feigenbaum's request that the American Fulbright program be re-established, the Minister said he concurred and that Fulbrighters may teach at local universities. He also stated that he is open to reviewing other proposals involving education.

18. (C) While emphasizing the need for students to repeat their year abroad at Uzbek universities, he said that approval for an exchange program that had been vetted by Uzbek and American university presidents beforehand might win the Ministry's endorsement. He noted the lack of involvement of the U.S. in Uzbekistan's revamping of its vocational training program, stating that several European countries and China and Japan have been supportive. He said U.S. recommendations and assistance in this field could be considered.

NGOs and Politics

19. (C) Digressing slightly, the Minister stated that NGOs sometimes operate outside of their charter, becoming involved in political activities. He made a point to note that these were not only American NGOs. DAS Feigenbaum emphasized the important role played by NGOs throughout the world, especially those involved with program implementation for U.S. government educational programs.

¶10. (C) In closing, Minister Kosimov reassured DAS Feigenbaum that Uzbekistan has "an open door" when it comes to discussing education.

Comment

¶11. (C) The oft-repeated refrain of "dialogue and cooperation" used by both ministers reflects the GOU's public rhetoric in recent days. There were no tangible commitments to support cooperation on education. Both Ministries refuse to release official transcripts for exchange candidates and participation in U.S. education programs is forbidden. The pointed comments about students needing to repeat the study year abroad also do not reflect recent practice. Returning students are required to pass an entrance examination before being admitted to the next grade, or as we have been hearing lately, pay a bribe to education officials.

¶12. (C) Education continues to be a topic of contention in the bilateral relationship. DAS Feigenbaum made an effective pitch for cooperation, and while non-committal in their responses, this is the first time in the past two years that Uzbek education officials at the ministerial level at least have met with U.S. officials and heard our views.

¶13. (U) DAS Feigenbaum has cleared this message.
PURNELL